

ROZZY, CHRISTMAS ANGEL

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notes were plaintive, melting, the tones of him who seeks the light:

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
Of angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold.

Those who were silks in that front pew drank in the vibrant tones with not a bit more felish than did she who wore rags. There was one difference: they looked straight at the Songbird; she closed her eyes as though she wanted just to hear, and to see only what imagination pictured.

Fear not! said he, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind.
Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind.

That was what the sexton had said! "Feel it and see if you don't get it." The voice thrilled with deepest emotion. This was not a choir boy singing for a salary; this was a soul delivering a message!

Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind.

The singing ceased. Rozzy dropped the music on the rack before him. There was a rustle of relief through the whole church, the breaking of a tension that had held hearts in harmony. The ragged girl's cheeks flushed as she returned the Songbird's smile. Her eyes sparkled as she wiped them with a handkerchief. Then, while the Doxology rolled beneath the mighty arches of greens, she gazed straight ahead, drew a long breath, brushed her rags past her silken neighbors, and walked down the aisle and out into the sunshine, her step sprightly, her head erect.

THEY all gathered round Rozzy afterward: the choir-master with a bit of pride, the pastor with a pat and a purr, the choir mother with glistening eyes, Fatty Miller with the old awe renewed, and every man and boy of them bursting with tongue-tied praise. And the janitor whispered to his wife, who was waiting for him to lock the doors and come home to his plum pud-

ding, that it would be a long, long time before any of them heard another solo like that.

Fatty started to walk home with him; but Rozzy said a hurried goodby and rushed down the stairs and up the road. He was home in ten minutes. A woman in white dress and cap met him at the door.

"Is she—will she—"
"Yes, Roswell," she interrupted. "The crisis is past. It came this morning."
He was up five stairs before she caught his coat tail.

"But you can't see her till she wakes up." And so he went out into the yard to play with the pups. Try as he would, the brown one simply would not jump through his arms. They all seemed wild to run, and run, and run. So he ran with them, dodged them, let them tumble over him as he lay on the ground. Suddenly he paused to find himself humming:

Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind.

The woman in white opened the door. "She's awake," she called.

The boy ran upstairs and into a room. As the woman left she heard him say:

"Oh, Sis, Sis!"

AND that is all. Had Rozzy, years later, married the strange girl who sat in the vacant place, with the sexton ringing the chimes, the two wardens and the richest man as guests, the choir-master at the organ, Fatty as best man, Milly as maid of honor, and the same pastor tying the knot, while the choir mother, her heart grown even larger with time, waited at the bride's house to help her with her things,—had these things come about, this would have been a story.

But Rozzy last saw the girl, head erect, step sprightly, walking out of the church, out into the sunshine, while the Doxology filled the broad spaces under the evergreen arches with thanksgiving.

That is why this is not a story, but just an incident about a choir boy who sang on Christmas morning.

THE WOMAN WHO FOUND HAPPINESS

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of humanity beside her. Lovingly, yearningly, she drew it close to her breast, and in the fullness of her contentment slept again.

When she awoke a second time the babe was still there. But again a sense of change disturbed her. Slowly and painfully she groped her way back to consciousness. One after another she picked up the loose threads of memory, now dropping two or three in the effort to secure another one, like a child gathering nuts, but eventually finding them again. Thus there swam into her consciousness the fact that she lay in a bed, that she smelled tobacco, that voices proceeded from an adjoining room. Yet, if her visit to Heaven was only a dream, whence came the babe in her arms? Exhausted by the inquiry, she again allowed her senses to float away into the mist of unreality.

She was recalled by a hand upon her brow. "Where am I?" she asked weakly.

"In Ketchum Jack's cabin," answered the same voice that had spoken before; a man's voice, she now perceived. "Don't you remember Ketchum Jack?"

"I think so. How did I get here?"

"You broke through the ice, and he saved you. It was almost a miracle. He chanced to be making the round of his traps when he heard your cry."

A familiar note about the voice teased her memory. "Who are you?" she asked.

"Can't you guess, my dear?"

"Cal?" she ventured, but strangely calm. She felt his lips upon her cheek.

"How did you get here? How did you know where I was?" said she.

"The doctor telegraphed me. I have been here ten days. You have had pneumonia."

It was unbelievable; but so were the other things that had happened to her.

"Am I going to live?" she asked presently.

"Yes, thank God!" His voice thickened in a sob.

"Why do you cry? You don't love me any more."

"Ah, my dear, that is why I cry,—because you think I don't love you, because you have thought so for a long, long time. Yet I never loved you better."

Her heart quickened; but she was silent for a moment, still fingering the tangled skein of memory. "Is it because you thought I was going to die?"

"No, no! I have never ceased to love you."

I may tell you now; for in your delirium you revealed the secret,—that the very condition which you thought had forfeited my love had bound me closer to you than ever. I felt so sorry for you."

AGAIN she felt a throb within; but dared not yet yield to her joy, lest it too, like the other things, should prove elusive. So she wrapped her weak fingers about his hand and peered fixedly into his face, just waxing into visibility in the gray light of dawn. Perhaps he could brush away the cobwebs that still clung to her mind.

"Cal, is it true that I have been to Heaven and got this little one for you and me?"

"I feel certain she came from Heaven," he answered with emotion; "for Dr. Greeley says she saved your life."

"But how did I get her?"

"Her mother died about three months ago. Her father accidentally shot himself a day or two after your mishap on the ice, and died that night. Dr. Greeley, when on his way to the county farm with her, stopped here to see you. The little thing cried. You heard the sound, and called for her so violently that we had to put her into your arms to soothe you. After that Greeley was afraid to take her away."

She lay still, thinking of that last tragic dash of hers toward the open water. But the horror of it was gone now, and she finally looked up at her husband with a wan smile.

"Cal, do you believe that God ever shows a heartick person the way out of his terror and gloom—literally, I mean?"

"I do."

"I am so glad," she answered with happy tears; "for I know He does. And I want to keep this little girl."

"So do I; for I have learned to love her."

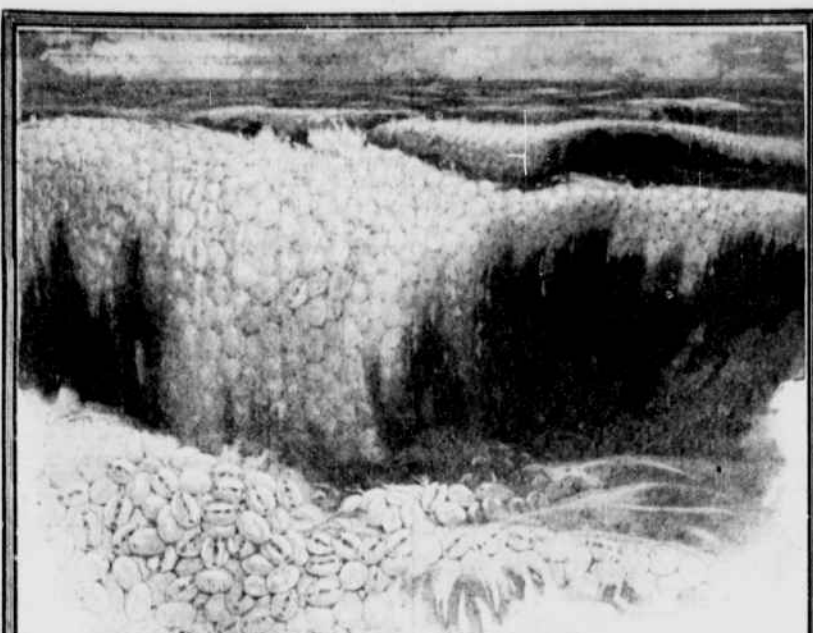
Her eyes were spirit bright, like one who has been chastened by fire. "I want to keep her, Cal, because she is mine. Do you know why she is mine?"

"I don't believe I could guess."

"Because I went down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death after her, just like a real mother."

"I had not thought of that," said he, smiling; "but it is true."

But just how true it was he did not suspect, and whether she should ever tell him was a question for the future to decide.



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